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## THE NEW ANTI-SEMITISM: HOW DANGEROUS?

Unfortunately it is now apparent to even the most skeptical that America is in the midst of a major revival of anti-Semitism. The number of anti-Semitic incidents -- including fire bombing, swastika splayings, and other acts of vandalism was almost three times as great in 1980 as it was in the year before. Here in Los Angeles we have seen an unprecedented epidemic including attacks on temples, cemeteries, and yeshivas.

A national dialogue has begun on how serious the situation is and what our response should be. Samuel Rabinove, head of the Civil Rights Division of the respected American Jewish Committee, is quoted as saying, "I do not believe it is a cause for alarm." Though Rabinove expresses concern, he concludes "...most of the culprits are kids, and most of their hostility towards the Jews is also against authority."

I disagree with Rabinove and others inclined to take the wave of anti-Semitism which has engulfed us lightly. I have studied their arguments, I reject their explanations. Let me take them one by one.

Some take comfort in the fact that anti-Semitic incidents do not appear to be part of an organized effort by any particular neo-Nazi group. I take no comfort in this, and I am not even certain that it is true. In a sense, we would be better off if one group or movement were at fault. The group could be identified and swiftly be

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brought to justice for violations of firearm laws, arson, destruction of property, etc. Is it not worse to confront hundreds, perhaps thousands, of grass-roots, free-lance anti-Semites?

The new anti-Semites are not responding to the demagoguery of a Gerald L. K. Smith or Father Coughlan. Unlike the German-American Bund of the 1930's, they do not identify with a growing foreign power. Instead, by a complex process they have come to direct their dissatisfaction and their hostility at history's favorite target: the Jews. How many Oswalds or Sirhans are there? Who are these nameless, faceless people? Kids? Few have been apprehended. We do not know their ages. The younger the less serious? Why?

Some take comfort in the fact that with very few exceptions, the damage done in anti-Semitic incidents in material terms, has been relatively inconsequential. For a few hundred dollars, even the most extensive Nazi graffiti can be painted over. This does not comfort me because I do not believe for a minute that the walls, windows or tombstones are the targets. They are mere symbolic substitutes for people -- Jewish people.

At current prices, a Torah scroll is "worth" approximately \$15,000. Yet those who cherish it and those who vandalize it have a shared idea of what it means. Destruction of a Torah scroll, by Jewish law and tradition is tantamount to the loss of a human life. Our enemies recognize our symbols as well as we do.

Some are cheered by the fact that the mass media are so sympathetic in depiction of a Holocaust. The mini-series on the Holocaust made television history and broke rating records. This does not comfort me. Frequently in Jewish history the best educated and most enlightened groups in the population were most friendly. How often did we turn to a progressive "Poretz" -- a Russian or Polish nobleman" in search of protection from peasant hordes? Historically

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our enemies are not to be found primarily among the creative people or the best bred, but among the dislocated rootless underclass such as that to which Hitler himself belonged.

To be realistic, we must note that the recognition of the horrors of the Holocaust in civilized circles has been sharply answered by an incredible repudiation of the Holocaust by those who would destroy us. How perverse, how deranged and utterly sick are the people behind the "debunking of the Holocaust?"

Who are these people who offer prizes to anyone who can prove a single Jew died in the concentration camp? Certainly they are not the now proverbial kids with cans of spray paint. They are literate -- even on the fringes of respectability. Yet, their hatred is so intense that they envy not our wealth or success, but our suffering. Why would anyone want to steal and obliterate the memory of the acrid smoke which poured from the chimney of Auschwitz?

Let me put it bluntly: I am alarmed. I do not care that fellow Jews label me as paranoid or lacking in an understanding of the fine points of psychology and sociology which explain anti-Semitism to their satisfaction. For Jews, and for society at large, the frequency of anti-Semitic incidents have always been a reliable measure of the ultimate spiritual health of a society. When that index triples in less than two years -- as it has -- alarm is the only prudent response.

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